MY SAGEBRUSH GARDEN

BY

SARAH BIXBY-SMITH

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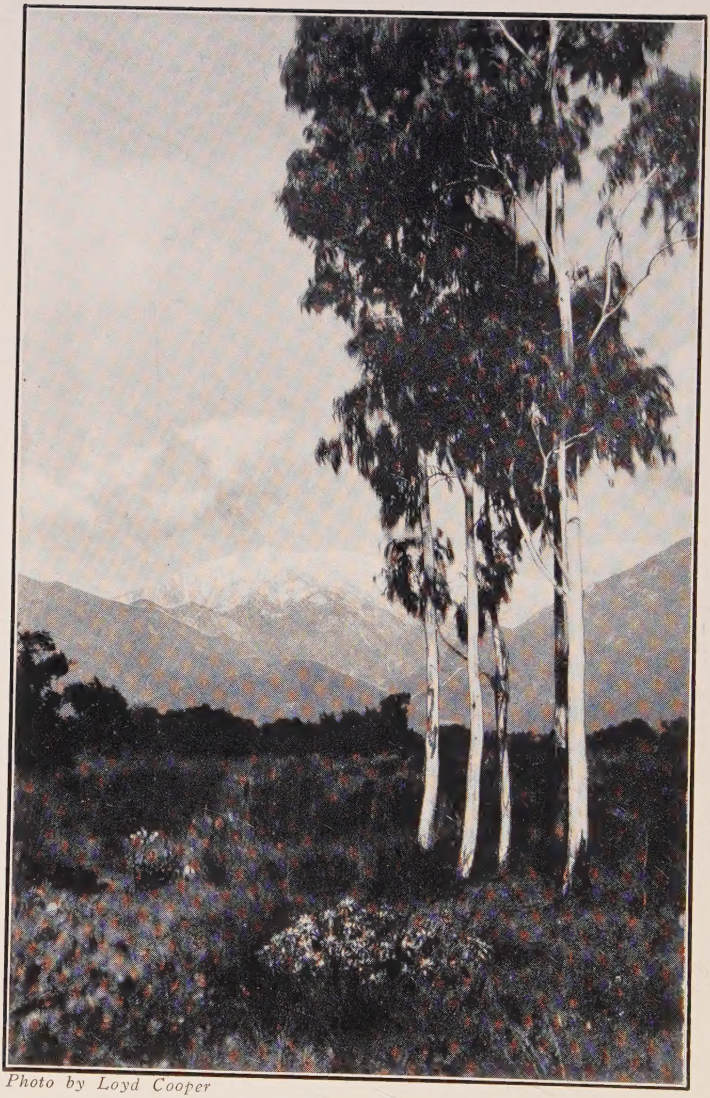

Photo by Loyd Cooper

AND BLUER MOUNTAINS RANGING HIGH, THEIR TALLER PEAKS WHITE-TIPPED WITH SNOW

MY SAGEBRUSH GARDEN

SARAH BIXBY-SMITH

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To
P. J. S.

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(NOTE. A few of these verses have appeared in *The Wellesley Alumnae Quarterly*, *The California Southland*, *The Lyric West*, and *The Long Beach Telegram*.)

I. MY SAGEBRUSH GARDEN

MY SAGEBRUSH GARDEN

I've a sagebrush garden
Walled in by a mountain range.

It is spring in my garden.
The staid live-oak
Embroiders her gown
With pale green leaves
And hangs it with tassels;
The bare mottled sycamore
Is dressing in velvet,
Crimson-edged tan;
The ragged old elder tree
Flaunts yellow lace,
And the delicate greasewood's white
Vies with the lilac's cloudy blue;
Dull red are the shoots of the sage;
They are ringed with lavender flowers
Like captive butterflies;
The cactus is showing its soul
In satiny saffron and crimson;
The yucca is here,
Fragrant fountain of white lilies;
There is lupine and wallflower,
Scarlet larkspur,
Sprite mariposa;
Here's a carpet of sunshine,
Here fell a pink cloud of dawn,
Here the fairies spilled their popcorn.
My beautiful wild brush garden
Sings color to the sun.

Bees in the sage,
Rabbits down the trail,
Wren in the cactus,
Brood of little quail,
Lizard in the sun,
Horned-toad on the run,
Humming-bird and butterfly,
One white cloud sailing high
In the sky,
Mocking-bird shouting joys,
Half a dozen little boys
Filling the air
With their jolly noise, —
All in my wonderful garden,
Rimmed by the mountains,
Roofed by the sun.

PAN IN THE SAGE

The moon, a yellow climber,
  Has scaled the mountain wall;
He's perching in the gum tree,
  Now strangely dark and tall;

He's laughing at the sights he sees,
  The flute notes in the air, —
That Pan is in the sagebrush
  He's very well aware.

O, Pan is in the sagebrush,
  The dusk's instinct with play, —
Let's laugh with the moon and gambol,
  And while the night away.

MIGRATION

Drifting softer than silence,
Like petals of wind-blown flowers,
Butterflies, golden and black,
Are filling the air;
Not in an aimless flitting,
But ever straight on to the north
They pass.
Whence do they come,
And whither go,
These million "Painted Ladies"?
Do they feel they are free as they fly
In the ancient airways
Of the sun-drenched sky?

INVITATION

Wallflower's yellow head is heavy
  Under her perfumed crown;
Chilicothe climbs to the top of the shrub
  And flings her garland down.

Shooting-star is a ballet dancer
  Pirouetting in the breeze;
The low sun paints with golden bands
  The green grass under the trees.

Walk with me in the open spaces,
  In this glowing evening light
Till the color of flower and grass and sky
  Has drifted into the night.

IN APRIL

A bluebird swings in the sycamore tree,
While I stand below
Where the wild grasses blow;
They brush my hand
With their silver-green hair,
Delicately.
The fairy banners of the oats
Flutter in the air.
The rustling grasses whisper
To the scented breeze.
The day is sweet with incense
From blossomed orange trees.

Fly away, gay bird,
In the sky so blue.
I wish I could fly, too.

THE SHORT-CUT

I walk the winding path
Over the wild land,
The joyous narrow path
Close pressed by life.
Here cactus calls for courtesy,
And silver grass
Dimples and bows
As I pass.
The brush has burst into blossom,
Deerweed and sage and rhus,
Tall pentstemon, delicate blue
With rosy throat,
And yarrow golden;
While on the branch of the scraggly tree
Is a bird, Japanesed on the sky.

JUNE NIGHT

Midnight and moonlight and June!
Air fragrant with blossoming sage
And cool, after the heat of noon.
We walk together, my dear,
Just you and I and the moon.

Listen! There must be
A mocking-bird in that tall tree.
He too finds delight
In this silvery night,
For he sits up high,
And sings to the sky
Rippling notes of melody.

Some say that he steals his music
From any he may hear,
But England is far away,
And no nightingales are near.
Perhaps he has stayed up late
To practise here, alone,
Joyously the carols
That truly are his own.

Here's to love and a merry tune,
Man and maid and singing bird,
Midnight and moonlight and June.

BLOWING GRASS

In Santa Ysabel
On sunny days in summer
When the hot winds blow,
All the pale gold grasses,
Ghosts of winter grasses,
Dance and curtsy low,
Till all the rounded hillsides,
Where the live-oaks grow,
Seem to leap from base to crest
With running fairy flames
That rise and find no rest.

MIRAGE

Shimmer, shimmer, summer air,
Over the lowland;
Shimmer, elfin lakes,
Where I know the fields are bare.

The far, tall trees are fringes of the sky,
Ghost-gray fringes, dipping to a silver sea,
A water witchery,
More lovely than reality,
In meadows brown and dry.

ROADSIDE

There is a roadside ditch I know
Where cat-tails grow,
And on its bank
Soft tufts of feathering anise stand,
Emerald and rank,
Amid the silvering wild oats, fanned
To a flutter by the wandering wind;
And there I find
Reddening, seed-hung sprays of dock,
And white star-faces of a lowly weed, —
Gay wild things that make mock
Of conquered fields,
Where barley grows,
And sugar beets in long straight rows.

This is February.
Into the valley the sunshine spills.
Green the grass sweeps up the hills
To the sky.
By the Rio Honda
Veils of new leafage lie
Over the thickets of willow.
The gnarled old sycamore trees
Show curling leaflets of velvet,
Tawny and rose;
And where the blossomed acacia grows
Hover the humming bees.
In the sage the alfilerilla spreads
A carpet of lacy leaves,
Green and varied reds,
With orchid-colored gilia decked,
And blue-eyes, bits of sky, cloud-flecked.
There's a whirr of wings
When the quail fly,
And a flash of flame with the flicker;
A lark sings;
That bolt of blue is a jay.
Spring's in the valley today
While Winter rides in the snow,
Astride the Sierra.

IN THE FOOTHILLS

Summer is the earth's siesta.
The tawny grasses sleep against the hill,
And native shrub and tree drowse on, content,
Victors in an age-long fight
Against the sun.

The blossoms of the buckwheat
Have been burned a rusty brown,
The threads of orange dodder
In tangled skeins are spread;
And all the green of weed and bush
Is grayed and dull,
Close covered by a filmy veil of dust.
The thirsty sun in the hot, pale sky,
Glares on, unhindered,
While the hazy mountains stand aloof,
Dim dreams.

At night from off the sea,
The fog, a cool gray sister,
Moves among the sleepers,
And life stirs,
But sleeps again by day
Until the long-gone rain returns.

Gently one day the clouds will hover
Over the land,
And soft, in the night, a raindrop will fall,
And another,
And another.
The skies will cry for joy

That the earth's long sleep is past,—
Gone the clinging mantle of dust,
Gone the coma of plant and seed;
The fresh, green grass will make a cover
For the barren hill and the dingy field;
From the summer prison the flowers are freed.

Rain, rain, rain,
First rain of the year,
Come in the night
And gone at the dawn,
You bring us spring in November.

THE BENDING TREE

Eucalyptus Viminalis,
Leaning ever eastward,
Bent by the winds that blew
As you grew,
At dawn
You are a plume
Against the rosy sky,
Waving welcome to the day;
At dusk
You are long strands of kelp
Floating in an airy ocean,
And the great moon
I see behind you
Is a sky abalone.

TIOGA ROAD

Among the peaks the great road goes,
High, high,
Above Yosemite,
To cross the bold Sierra.

In stately rows
The firs and pines and cedars rise
Like copper columns, straight and tall,
Their serried tops green-pointed
On the sky.
In grass time or in snow
They go
Over endless ridges,
Down the purple valleys
To the far, faint horizon
Where fairy mountains lie.
Around their pillared trunks
The young trees grow,
And ferns,
And the scarlet flower of the snow,
While fretted sunshine falls,
And pools of shadow,
On rock, or needle-bed, or meadow.

A sapphire lake lies hollowed
In a great rock basin
Whose jagged, towering walls
Are rose and violet-gray
Against a sky of lapis-lazuli,
Whereon cloud galleons are followed
By wind-blown spray.

Between the granite cliffs
A gentle field is spread;
The singing little river
Lays a silver thread
Across the grass,
And fluttering aspens bow and greet
The travellers who pass.

THE QUAKING ASPEN

Aspen is a dryad, free,
Dancing by the mountain streams
Where the winds are fresh and keen.
Her lithe, white body gleams
Through veils of silver gray
And sunlit green,
Pellucid as a running wave at sea
Before it breaks in spray.

SKETCHES

I. Morning

Lay in an ancient eucalypt
With rugged trunk and limbs new stripped
Of shredded cerements of brown,
Revealing, on the inner bark,
Patterns scattered up and down
Of rose and gray, of sage and tan;
With tender shoots of pale blue leaves
Against the mass of old ones, dark
And slender. Then sweep in sky
Of cobalt-blue, and a cloud or two,
And bluer mountains, ranging high,
Their tallest peaks white-tipped with snow.
The plains, below, dark orchards show.
With a stroke of yellow the sketch is done,—
Yellow, where mustard spreads nets for the sun.

II. Evening

A jade-green sky and one scarlet cloud;
A mountain looming, grim and livid;
Purple-shadowed, crimson-shouldered, vivid;
A rolling hill, its top new-ploughed,
Velvety brown in the sunset light;
Across the ruddy fields a sheen
Of sprouting barley, silver-green;
One tall old pine as black as night.

WINDOW DAWN

I awake.
Antiphonal clocks strike four.
Three bands of gray
Cross my wide window, eastward opening,—
Three bands of gray:
The narrow dark of mesa,
The middle cloud bank
And the high pale sky.
A venturing vine silhouettes
A caravan of humped leaves
Across the screen;
Cool, moist air is pungent with sage;
Waking birds twitter,
The rooster summons the sun,
And a quail calls.

TREE MAGIC

In this dry desert land
Some trees sound like water
When they play in the wind,
So, if my ears are open
And my eyes are shut,
I can travel
On Scheherezade's carpet
Far away.

The silver cottonwood
Is flirting with a zephyr,
And I am gone
To a far land
Of elms and maples,
Of running waters,
Lush grass and summer showers.

The breeze is blowing
Through the blue gums,
And straightway I am napping
On a stony beach
Of the lee side of an island
In the sun,
Where a lone wave is lapping,
And all the little pebbles
Chase it up and down.

UNDER THE TREE

Last night I slept by the roadside
In the dry grass under a tree;
The little leaves were whispering
Drowsily to me
Of a many raindrops falling,
Or the swish of a summer sea.
Perhaps it was star-dust drifting
That stirred my poplar tree!

THE OAK IN THE WASH

Blue and white the fretted sky
Beyond the oak tree's roof shines clear.
Branches, twigs and sparse, stiff leaves
Encircling, make a hemisphere
Of delicate tracery, like an iron screen
Wrought by some ancient smith. I'm glad
As I swing in a friendly, low-hung crook
Of a trailing limb, while the clouds go by,
And a soft-spoken, loitering wind.
I forget that the world is all awry,
While I smell the sage, and hear the birds,
And look at the screen and the sky.

SEA WIND

Sea wind, blow through me,
Blow through me and clean me,
Lift off the weight of world woe
That bends low my spirit;
Make me forget my moods and my burdens;
Tell me of sunlight,
And wide sky and ocean,
Tell me of eons
And limitless space.
Let me exult for an hour
As I stand
High on the wind-swept,
Wave-plowing bow.
Sea wind, blow through me.

RETURN

The empty ranch I used to know,
Unfenced and open and ten miles wide,
Is cut into farms and swarming towns
Where we buy and sell and sub-divide.
The long smooth beach whose lonely tide,
Unseen, unknown, would ebb and flow,
Whose sand was covered with curious shells,
Queer star-fish, kelp and wading birds,
Is crowded with shops and called "The Pike."
And the hill that pastured the roving herds
Is a mass of derricks, engines and wells.
The oil makes all things ugly and black.
The old dusty road is a polished track
Where thousands motor to and fro, —
Gone is the silence I used to know.
On houses and highway I turn my back.

I look to the marsh, unsought by men.
Here I loiter, a child again;
I smell the wild celery, still in its place,
And love the mustard's delicate lace,
Along the by-way, meandering free,
Where silvery willows now grow rank,
And blackberry vines. A soft gray bank
Of drifting fog hangs over the sea,
With mystery closing the west.
A trickling streamlet makes a shining band
Across the summer waste of sand;
A meadow-lark, exultant, sings

And a lithe young squirrel, a moment at rest,
Carefully poised, with his head held high,
Seems like me to be looking at things,
To be sharing my joy in fields and sky.

MY COYOTE

I never see that hill
Where now high billboards
Spoil the sky
But I see the lone coyote
That my child eyes saw,
Still poised upon that crest.
I little thought that day
That he had come to stay
And hide himself away
In some corner of my brain,
Whence now he comes at will
To that city-threatened hill
And lopes along the sky-line
In the west.

SIGNAL HILL

O, little hill,
For unnumbered years
Of cycled green and brown
You lay,
Under sun, under fog,
Under rain-drops falling down.
You had no name,
You had no fame.

Frisking squirrels made laced trails
Along your sides,
And little owls, like gnomes,
With secret look and wise,
Stood in the doorways
Of their tiny tunnelled homes,
And stared with blinking eyes,
While lean coyotes hunted,
And howled to empty skies.

Men came: Indians,
Whose strange and simple ways
Are buried in forgotten days.

Men came: Spanish,
Little thinking they would vanish
When some paltry years should pass.
They called you Los Cerritos,—
The little hills.
Their herds of cattle roamed upon you,
And bands of cropping sheep
Here ate their fill
Of weeds and flowers and grass.

The tale is told
How Don Juan Temple,
Of Rancho Los Cerritos,
And Don Abel Stearns,
Of neighboring Alamitos,
Matched their horses speed,
Wagering a thousand head of cattle;
How they raced from your high top
To the ocean and return,
Without stop.
Gay the watching señoritas,
Silken-dressed, with lace mantillas;
Brave and bold the cabelleros,
Velvet-clad, with silver trappings,
Wide sombreros and serapes.
There they waited, laughing, jesting,
For the winner of the wager,
Shouted then for Besesero,
Winner of the thousand cattle,
And the honor for Cerritos.

Again men came: Americans.
They changed your fortune and your fate,
Changed your title, your estate.
Gone your lilting name, Cerritos;
You are Signal Hill,
Your beauty desecrate.
Great black derricks cast long shadows,
Throbbing engines beat the air,
And black, black are men and meadows.
Boring, boring, they are boring

Everywhere,
Seeking traces
Of your long-stored treasure.
Groaning, roaring your displeasure,
Shuddering and snorting fire,
You yield oil
To their toil.

Oil, black magic of today,
Prisoned rainbows, thunders, sunrays,
Prisoned beauty, prisoned power —
Power to move mountains
Or to search the utmost skyways,
Greatest wealth of men and nations,
Black wizard, escaping from earth's dungeons.

These are your vain-glorious days,
Signal Hill,
Giving largesse without heed,
Or dealing heart break
To thwarted greed.
But when men have taken all your hoardings
And the years have come and gone,
You will be again a nameless little hill,
Lying in the sun.

Photo by Loyd Cooper

THE YUCCA IS HERE, FRAGRANT FOUNTAIN OF WHITE LILIES

II. ONCE I WAS A LITTLE GIRL

THE STORY

I wish I were once more
A little, listening maid,
Cuddled in a lap,
My head against a shoulder laid
While Auntie tells a story,—
To feel again the thrill,
To see again the glory
Of the shining, summer day
When Patty strayed away
To the grassy, windy hill,
Where wild flowers grew,
Yellow, red and blue;
To chase the butterflies,
A happy little rover;
To be lost and weep,
To cry myself to sleep
In the clover,
And be found;
To be cozy, small and still
While Aunt Martha tells the story
Of the runaway on the hill.

A FORENOON

There is sun in the sky
And salt in the air,
Come, run down the hill
To the river.
There's a smell of wild celery
And the song of a lark,
And a flock of jet birds,
Each wing scarlet-marked.
Let's pull up a tule
And chew its white end,
And follow the river around the bend,—
We can do as we please
Until dinner.

IN THE VINEYARD

On hands and knees
In the soft brown earth
Under the vines we crawl,—
We are hidden safe
From the sight of all.

Flat on our backs
In the warm green light
Our stories we tell
While we dream and feast
On Mission and Tokay
And Muscatel.

WATERMELONS

It is shearing time and summer,
And hot on the dusty floor.
There are fat round watermelons
Outside the wool-barn door,—
Melons for sale for a nickel,
Papa will give us the nickel,
Don't you like the feel
Of the juice on your ears
While you bury your nose
In the soft warm pink,
And hear the clink of the shears?

THE DUMP-CART RIDE

Take Sorrel and the dump-cart,
  Climb in and drive away,—
No grown-up to tell us
  What to do or say.

Jolt along the sunny road,
  Shout and joke and sing;
Stop and get that pumpkin,
  See that blackbird's wing.

Watch the little ground-owl
  Turn his funny head;
Gather these fresh rushes
  To new-roof Billy's shed.

There's some jerked beef drying
  On this bare old tree,—
A lunch of it will save us
  From starving until tea.

HIDE-AND-SEEK

We are growing so old
We are very bold;
We can play, without fright,
Hide-and-seek at night,
When the moon is round
And the garden ground
Shines in witch-silver light.
From shadow to shadow
We stealthily creep,
And make no sound
When we see a bat's flight,
And hear his weird cheep.

Harry and I have climbed so high
No one can see
Where we rest on the limb
Of this old pepper tree.
Here we will wait
Till the others cry,
"All are in free."

PLAY IN THE BARN

Nimble feet and happy laughters
  Echo in the old barn
High among the rafters,—
  What a place for fun!

Careful, Baby,
Don't you try to run;
This plank is plenty wide
For little feet, if you'll go slow,
Though the floor is thirty feet below.

We'll put you in
This big grain bin,
Where you'll be safe inside
While we climb higher
Into the gable.
Sometime, Baby, you'll be spryer,—
Then you'll be able
To come up, too,
Into this nest of the Boogaboo.

SPOT

Spot was a boy's horse,
Fast and sleek and good.
Like a statue he stood,
Or a steed of wood,
When we polished his legs
And curled his tail,
Or swarmed on his back
And curried his side;
Or under him sat
And brushed his belly.
But off for a ride
Over the ranch land,
Open and wide,
He flew.
He knew
How to be a boy's horse.

Spot 's gone to horse heaven,
And the children, too,
Have vanished from view,
Grown up and old,
Fred and Nan, Sallie and Sue.

HUMMING-BIRD

A humming-bird built
  In a hollyhock tree
Her tiny white nest
  Where I could see,
And I liked her
  And she liked me.

She sat quite still
  When I stood close by,
But she watched me well
  With her shiny black eye.

Her two tiny eggs
  Looked like beans, smooth and white.
Who'd think little birds
  Could be packed so tight?

Funny black babies
  Without one feather,—
A hollyhock leaf
  Kept off the bad weather.
Soon mother and little ones
  Flew off together.

Bronze backs, ruby throats,
  How they all shone!
Little felt nest
  Left all alone.

CLOUDS

Lie on your back
  On a windy high hill slope;
Watch in the sky
  A cloud kaleidoscope:

White dragons and elephants
  Cavorting in the blue
Change to satyrs and ogres,
  Grimacing at you;

Change with but a puff of wind
  To sailing ships at sea,
Or heaping ice-cream cones
  For some lady-giant's tea.

RAIN JOY

O, I'm wading in the gutters
That are running ankle-deep;
The rain began last night
Before I went to sleep.

And Papa's face is smiling
Because he's lost the fear
That makes him look so gloomy
When we have a dry year.

There'll be grass for sheep and lambs
And the cattle will have feed,
And for talk about the poor-house
We have no further need.

O, I'm splashing in the gutters
While the rain is pouring down,
And everybody's happy
In our muddy old town.

AFTER THE RAIN

How black you look,
Old Pine Tree,
Against the clearing silver sky,
Cloud-tossed.
Are you not glad for the rain?
Perhaps you are too old
And dignified
To look happy.
Your little sister, Acacia,
Smiles and shakes her yellow curls
At Father Sun,
Slyly peeping at her.

HOP-SCOTCH

It's hot, I say,
Playing hop-scotch here today
On this gravelly walk.
I guess it's better just to talk,
Lying in the shade
Of this old rubber tree.
This hollow that its big roots made
In our lawn
Is just the place for me.
Bertha, you sit there,—
The rest of you can stay
Any old where.
Talking about hop-scotch,
It's pretty hard on shoes,—
Doesn't wear 'em even
'Less you can choose
To hop on either foot,
And hop as well.
Now on my right one
I can never tell
Just where the rock is going
When I kick.—
Say, this leaf here
Makes a jolly fan.
Hi! There's the Ice-Cream Man!
I hear him yell.
Yes, there he is,
Coming down the road;
That freezer on his head

Must be an awful load.
There are spoons and tumblers
On that tray he's got.
He'll give us each a lot
If we can pay.
In my bank I have two-bits,
And we are five today.
I'm glad he's come. Hooray!

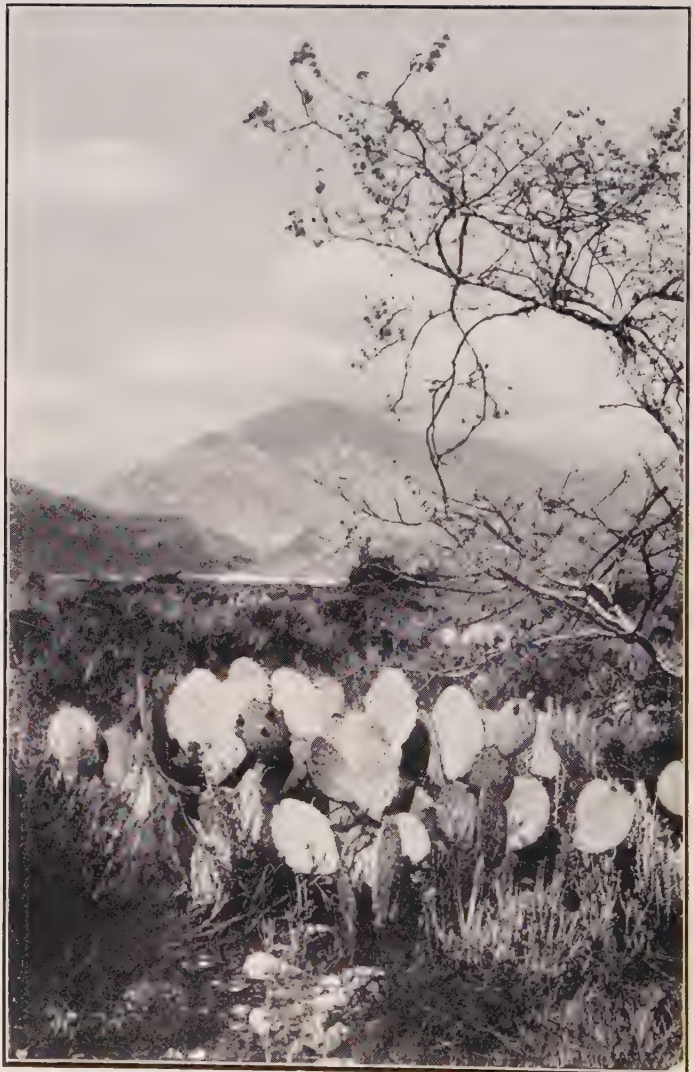

Photo by Loyd Cooper

HERE CACTUS CALLS FOR COURTESY

III. THE BLUE THREAD

THE BLUE THREAD

I stand at life's loom,
In my soul's silent room,
Watching the shuttle that flies,
Weaving the days through the years, —
Days of prismatic dyes.
In the gray warp of years
A long thread appears,
Thread of blue;
It is beauty, it is romance,
It is you!

LOVE DENIED

Love, denied, will take its toll of life,
Which, if expressed, perchance would lead to joy
And, later, sweet content; or, unopposed,
Would flare a day, then gently drift to sleep;
Repressed, it grows insistent, and demands
Too great a place in heart and brain and nerve,
And leads, in weaker souls, to morbid thought
Or habit; but they whose souls are strong,
While paying heavy tax in grief and pain,
Transmute it into sympathy and power.

TREASURE

Golden beads on a silken thread
  Are my rare days with you,—
Days are the beads and love is the thread,
  Silken and supple and true.
I lay my treasure in a place apart,
A secret place, which is my heart.

FRAGMENT

It is easy to blame for a garish fault,
But what was the reason why
We failed to be friends,
You and I?

Nothing we know of what might have been,
Little we know what is.
Only the surface of life is seen,—
Hidden the play of forces keen
That draw us together and drive us apart.
If we could see,
What would we find in each other's heart?

REVELATION

My Soul, today
His guard of years
One moment slipped away.
You saw his heart
Through his eyes.
Then the quick curtain fell.
My Soul, can you tell
If bitter or sweet the prize?

COMRADE

Contentment,
Like a placid pool
Filled with color
Is mine,
When you shine,
My Sun.

But if you frown,
Gloom drives away
Beauty.

DESIGN

A pencil trace
Made by his hand
Has captured grace
In this small space.

How strange that sight
Of five black lines
Arranged on white
Should give delight!

ELUSIVE NIGHT

Night is clad in silver brocade,
Silver, woven with blue.
She glistens with spangles
And wears in her crown
The moon, a luminous pearl.
The dark seas are her skirts,
And the white waves that curl
Are ermine on her gown.

The face of Night wears joy and wonder
To the shining eyes of the lover;
But tragedy and woe
To those who know
The sorrow and pain
That Night must cover.

She comes, she goes,
Aloof and strong,
Regardless of the joys of men,
Regardless of the wrong.

AHOY

What am I?
A mote in the sky
Fast to a star,
An organized atom,
A cell of the whole,—
Yet how I can suffer,
How I enjoy!

There must be
Many like me
Sailing afar
On some voyaging star.
Star-ship, Ahoy!

SKY GIRL

The mountain is my ladder
To the sky.
I have climbed,
I have climbed
Where the ferny pathways lie
On Tantalus; atop this island
I stand high.
Far below, the singing sea
Spreads its gorgeous blue
For me,
And drifting clouds are white
In the velvet valleys,
Shining in the tropic light,
Dropping purple shadows.
The merry wind goes laughing by
And catches at my hair,
And tosses raindrops
On my body, free and bare,
While I go dancing with the wind
And shout to showers that pass,
And feel my happy toes
In the long wet grass.

MIND-LIFE

I am a woman, old and lame;
I drag down the weary street
In the dusk, to my room,—
My soot-gray room.
I shut the door and draw the blind,
No light do I make, save in my mind.
Then:
I am a dryad, wild and shy;
I live in a bosky wood;
I flit through the trees
Or lie in the fern,
While the green glow filters in.
I am a naiad, with tan-brown limbs;
I cut through the waves with a lusty stroke;
I float in the sun with the lilies white,
And play with the dragon-fly;
I leap the falls with the shining fish;
I swim, I am lithe,
I am strong.
I run on the hills
In sun and rain;
I run on the hills,
I am free,
I run!

YOUTH WILL NOT STAY

Open and free
The edge of the sea,
Sun in the wide, clear sky;
Gaily the hours glide by.
Live, laugh and love
While you may,—
Youth will not stay.

Witching the night,
Stars and moonlight,
Silvered the sea and the sand.
Throbbing the beat of the band.
Dance, boy and girl,
While you may.
Youth will not stay.

MY HAND

My hand,
I like you.
I thank you
For the joy you've given me:
For the feel of running water,
Or of pliant, wet adobe
That my childish fingers squeezed
Till it oozed
Through your every chink and cranny;
For the smoothness of live fur,
Or of velvet woven,
Or of hair;
For the texture of a lily,
And of smooth leaves crispy,
An apple or a pear;
For the pleading softness,
Fairy, downy softness
Of a new-born's tiny cheek,
Or the snuggling hand of a child,
Or the sweet, firm flesh of youth.
Hand, I like you,
And again I thank you,—
Thank you for your deftness,
Your habit of obedience
And forgive you when you fail
To make a copy fair and true
Of some beauty pictured in my brain.

MY LITTLE CHILD IS DEAD

My little child is dead,
My new-born son.
He lay on my arm an hour
And then was gone.
And I am stunned, and drift.
Come back, my slipping Self!
I must not go with him,
For my work is not yet done.
I am weak and I weep.
I must be strong and sleep,
For my other boys at home.

I wonder what lies folded
Within his silent form,
What joy is lost,
What sorrow saved
Because he died when born.

We rise a moment from the earth
And sink again,
An ever changing throng.
Measured by the ages
I know not wherein differ
The short life and the long.

But yet, bereft, I cry,
My little child is dead —
Is dead. O, why?
What mean the long days given
To fashioning this man-child?
What mean the days of hope

Now blotted out with pain?
I do not know.
I only can be reconciled
When I recall that now
No sordidness of life can stain,
No weight of woe can crush
This little child of mine.

JANET'S HAIR

Every day,
Shining gold,
Slipping, glinting sunshine,
Rippling, clinging, fine-spun gold
My miser hands caress,
My miser eyes possess,
Hoard the beauty of each tress
Of your silken hair,
That I dress, little daughter,
Every day.

WHO KNOWS

My little son sat on my lap
Before the open fire,
And sighed a weary sigh.
"What is it, dear?" said I.
"Everything's wrong!" was his reply,—
"Those tongs, there by the fire,
They look like tongs,
We call them tongs,
But don't know really
What they are."

My son has grown to be a man
And has been sent to war.
Does he look at men,
And call them men,
But wonder what men are?

THE ADOPTED BOY

You are mine, mine, mine,
Strong little body,
Searching spirit rare,
Mine by the love I give you,
Mine by the care!
It was I who each day
Felt your soft little form
Lie on my arm in the bath;
It was my loose hair
That your learning fingers caught
As you nestled to sleep in my neck;
I saw your smile grow to a laugh;
I was the mother who taught
You to talk and to walk.
I answered your wondering questions
And kissed your bumps,
And bound up your little boy bruises.
How much more mine would you be
Had you lived nine short months in my body?
Your body-mother gave you away.
Someone might count the months
From the day when the ancient rites were mumbled
To the day you were born.
And she feared more than she loved.
She gave you away, her first-born.
She does not know where you are,
She does not know you are cherished,
She does not know your bright black eyes,

Nor your gay boy laugh,
Nor the heart-throb of your plunging hugs.
Does she cry in the night
Because she does not know?
Now you are mine.
The world on its fingers
Could not count nine.

QUERY

What is in your heart, foreign maid,
Who sit with Buddha face,
Placid, unmoved,
Among the young girls of this
To you alien race?
All your life you have lived among us,
And our tongue is yours.
Is your heart at home,
And does it hurt sometimes
Because you differ outwardly?
Or does your pride in wealth and race
Wrap round you, keep you warm, content?
Is it a soul alive and glad,
Or a soul sad
That lies behind your passive face?

THE DEAR LITTLE LADY

There's a dear little lady
  Living in our western town;
Her curly locks have whitened,
  And she wears a simple gown.

She was born, O, long ago
  In an ancient Irish castle
That in storied times gone by
  Knew both lord and humble vassal.

She remembers the great hall
  Where the fires were all aglow,
And the men and dogs from hunting
  Came in out of rain and snow.

Then her father left his homestead
  For a lonely, distant land,
Where the trees and wildwood flowers
  Shut them in on every hand.

In the far Canadian forest,
  In a log house hid away,
She grew slowly into girlhood,
  She grew charming, day by day.

She could dance and she could sing,
  She could work and she could play;
She soon won a wedding ring,
  Little maiden, blithe and gay.

Days of sorrow, days of joy,
  Woman's share in life she's known;

While the many years have passed.
Now she's living all alone.

She can cook and she can sew,
She can wield her rake and hoe,
Planting posies in a row,—
How she makes her garden grow!

She is busy still and sprightly,
And can turn a merry jest,
For her eighty years sit lightly,—
Life has never lost its zest.

MARY DOYLE

Mary Doyle was old and poor,
She scrubbed my kitchen floor.
Her blue eyes snapped,
And her laugh was gay,
The house was glad on cleaning day
For her Irish wit
And her kindly way.
She could not read and she could not write,
But her wise remarks were our delight.
There was never a sigh, never a moan,
Though she must daily toil alone
For her idiot child; her drunken man
Was "ill," she said.
God rest her soul,
Now she is dead.

THE OLD SCIENCE TEACHER

I see him go along the shady road
With lifted head, though time has bent his back,
And weighed him down with pain, a heavy load,—
A little, grey-haired man, who lives alone.
He keeps his courage, and his mind is keen to know
The happenings today in sky and earth,
The truths he taught and studied long ago.
He makes a record of our days: of snow
Upon the mountains, cold that brings a freeze,
Of winds, the "Santa Anas," heaping sands
Across the roads and blowing down the trees;
Of heat, and how much rain his guage
Has marked each year. A Yankee man, whom age
Has never robbed of skill to use his hands.
We take to him our clocks that will not run,—
The ways of pendulums and wheels he understands.
He loves old chairs and tables, and can mend
The saddest heirloom that has crossed the plains,
Or weave a missing seat of cane anew.
When night, or weariness, or winter rains
Have shut him in alone, he sits and thinks;
He dreams of past days, and of men he's known;
Of boys he used to teach in old Vermont
And what the fruitage of the seed he's sown.
One youth who sat before him in the school

Was Calvin Coolidge, quiet country lad,—
Now he heads the nation. With inward look
The old man sits and ponders on life's puzzle,
And what he finds he writes down in a book.

THE PASSER-BY

He goes about our quiet streets,
A strange, round hat upon his head;
There's a gentle whimsey in his face,
A lightness in his tread.

His heart is often heavy,
And his work a tedious bore,
As varied as a line of posts
Along a dreary shore.

He goes about our silent streets
With his quaint hat set high,
And gives our town distinction
As he smiles and passes by.